

# Mobilizing Communities One Bystander at a Time

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Above: Handprints from youth leaders at St. James Middle School in St. James, MO.

## Question:

*How do you engage communities in sexual violence prevention?*

### The Challenge:

Missouri Rape Prevention and Education (RPE) funded agencies face challenges engaging community leaders to address sexual violence prevention as an important public health issue. Building partnerships with community leaders and establishing sexual violence prevention networks takes time. Furthermore, it requires persistence, patience and encouragement. Many agencies across Missouri consistently report their biggest challenge is getting school administrators and staff excited and involved in sexual violence prevention work. Schools report full schedules, limited classroom time and strong pressure to focus on standardized test scores as barriers to implementing sexual violence prevention in the classroom.

### The Solution:

No one agency can do this work alone. Mobilizing communities and changing societal attitudes towards the perpetration of violence is a necessary foundation for successful sexual violence prevention. This requires the engagement of non-traditional community partners such as schools, athletic departments and faith-based groups. The goal is to involve partners to increase participation at each level of the social ecology, from the individual to the societal level. The Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services has partnered with the Missouri Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence to provide training and technical assistance on the Middle School Community Mobilization Program (MSCMP) to violence prevention educators and school administrators. The MSCMP is designed to develop skills-based

*“Green Dot has given our agency new ways in getting individuals actively involved in preventing sexual violence and moving into the realm of a lifelong commitment to preventing and ending sexual violence...”*

–Jennifer Quain, Violence Prevention Educator, Russell House, Phelps County Family Crisis Services, Inc.



bystander intervention techniques among youth, specifically sixth, seventh and eighth grade students. The program was created under the guidance and direction of Dorothy Edwards, Ph.D., author of the Green Dot Violence Prevention Strategy.

#### **The Results:**

Three Missouri agencies participated in the pilot phase of the newly developed MSCMP. The curriculum requires school representatives and violence prevention educators to attend the trainings together. These trainings enhance the organizational capacity of both RPE funded agencies and local schools to implement sexual violence prevention strategies while strengthening their partnership and engaging additional community partners. Following completion of the training, school representatives and prevention educators collaborate to implement staff-wide trainings on bystander intervention, inviting the school cooks, janitors, teachers, counselors and other adults that routinely interact with youth. Outside school partners also are invited to attend, including board members, police officers and community leaders. Later phases of the program engage and train parents and student leaders on skills-based bystander intervention. In the last stage of the process, all students are taught how to become an active bystander to end violence in their own unique way. The MSCMP takes a varied approach that engages individuals, community and society. Ultimately, engaging multiple partners creates greater sustainability in the movement for social change. It isn't one agency's job to end sexual violence, it is everyone's!

#### **Highlighted Story:**

Russell House at Phelps County Family Crisis Services, Inc. in Rolla, MO is one of the pilot agencies for the MSCMP. They chose to implement MSCMP as a more universal way to discuss sexual violence prevention that would feel safe for their rural community and engage people across the lifespan. Russell House is implementing the MSCMP with St. James Middle School. This partnership developed several years ago and continues to have strong support and commitment from administration and staff. School staff members have been trained in bystander intervention techniques and more recently, a student leadership group was formed. These students were chosen by their peers and endorsed by staff as good role models and someone they would go to for help. Together, youth are able to take ownership in ending bullying, harassment and violence and feel empowered to intervene in their own unique way.

For more information, please contact:

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